

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-24WASHINGTON POST
28 April 1984

Israel Denies Arming Nicaraguan Contras

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The director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry yesterday denied that his country has provided arms to U.S.-backed contra guerrillas fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, and he said Israel does not intend to become involved in Central America's military struggles.

"I haven't come to arrange how Israel is going to take over the contras," David Kimche said in a meeting with reporters. "We have not, are not and, I presume, will not be supplying military equipment to the contras."

Kimche, here for talks with U.S. offi-

cials, was referring to speculation that the Reagan administration, seeking to get around Congress' cutoff of covert-action funding for the contras, wants Israel or some other third country to take over financing and direction of the guerrilla campaign.

The persistence of these reports prompted the Israeli government to issue a formal denial on Thursday after Kimche met with Lawrence S. Eagleburger, undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Kimche acknowledged that the talks here included discussion of how Israel might increase its technical assistance programs in Third World areas, including

Central America. But, he insisted, such aid would be limited strictly to peaceful projects like agricultural assistance.

Israel's policy, he said, is to sell arms only to "properly constituted, constitutional governments" and not to irregular movements. He acknowledged that Israel has sold weapons to various Central American countries, but he said El Salvador was not among them and is unlikely to become an Israeli arms recipient.

Diplomatic sources said the Israeli government does not want to become involved militarily in Central America because it is aware that many of its U.S. supporters are hostile to the administration's covert activities.